Fix This

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at https://archiveofourown.org/works/34973626.

Rating:
Teen And Up Audiences

Archive Warning:
No Archive Warnings Apply

Category:
Gen

Fandom:
Batman - All Media Types

Characters:
Tim Drake, Jason Todd

Additional Tags:
Rated T for brief profanity, Sickfic, Emotional Hurt, Vomiting, Tim Drake Needs a Hug, Tim Drake Angst, Jason Todd is Red Hood, Suicidal Thoughts, (said half-jokingly but not really)

Language:
English

Series:
Part 1 of Mutual Aid, Part 5 of The Returnverse

Collections:
batman fics that i love so much, God-Tier Short Fics and Oneshots, DevilishDC

Stats:
Published: 2021-11-06 Words: 4,943 Chapters: 1/1

Fix This

by lurkinglurkerwholurks

Summary

Written in the awful sliver of time where Bruce is dead, Jason is on the outs with the family, and Tim is, too. Everything would have been easier if they could have been alone together instead.

——Can be read as a standalone——

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

Life was weird. Either you don't end up where you expect, or you get to where you did expect but in an inexplicable way, or both. And no matter what path you took, nothing made sense along the way.

Tim's life felt extra weird, though. Maybe everyone's did, from the inside, but Tim was sure that his was that next-level weird, and not all the same kind of weird either. Some of the weirdness was bad. Anything with the Rogues was bad. All the times he had been kidnapped, shot at, threatened, beaten, all bad. The way he could be surrounded by privilege and security but feel totally alone… that was bad. A supposed little brother-turned-rival appearing out of nowhere had been bad. Bruce dying had been really, really bad.

Some was good. Meeting the Waynes had been good. Getting to be Robin was good. Going from watching Batman and Nightwing from afar to being on a first-name basis with both was good. Being adopted by Bruce… that had been good. Really good.

But, by and large, the weirdness was just weird. Like, Tim wasn't even sure how to classify Jason at this point. Robin Jason? Good! Dead Jason? Bad. Resurrected Jason? Good! Homicidal Red Hood Jason? Real bad.

He had thought that last one was where it would end, the balance of the weirdness that was Jason Todd tipping off the knife's edge and into a deficit. But then Bruce had died. And the bad had just kept coming and coming and *coming*.

On a particularly bad night, Tim had escaped a matchup by the metaphorical skin of his teeth—two bullet wounds, broken ribs, a broken finger, and an assortment of scrapes and bruises. He had almost given up, had almost just sat down in one of Gotham's hundreds of back alleys to wait for someone to finish him off. Instead, he had done the next closest thing and crawled through the rain up into the jimmied window of one of Hood's safehouses.

Instead of being empty, Jason had been inside, as if waiting for him to appear. And instead of doing everyone a favor and putting a cap in his head, Jason had patched Tim up and sent him on his way.

Jason Todd. The weirdness of life that just *was*.

That had been the start of it, Tim's whatever-it-was with Red Hood. They weren't friends. They definitely weren't brothers. He didn't think they could even be classified as allies. On any given day, there was a

not-insignificant probability that Hood would finish the job he should have started that awful, rainy night.

But so far he hadn't. With the Manor burned as far as Tim was concerned, he found himself crawling through Red Hood's window more often. Sometimes when he needed help—stitches, an icepack, bandages. Sometimes when he just… couldn't take the bad anymore. Hood wasn't a comfort, but he also wasn't fake. And that was enough.

Tim's goal was still Bruce. It was always Bruce. He *knew* Bruce wasn't dead the same way astronomers in days of yore knew that there were dark and lonely planets circling just beyond the edge of sight. He had no tangible proof, but he could feel the pull. And until he could get proof, he would keep pushing, and he would continue the work Bruce had left behind.

That meant patrols, as dark and lonely as Neptune's orbit. Tim stayed out of Dick's way as best he could, taking wide and circuitous paths out of the usual route. Dick had tried to force the issue once or twice, but the city was too big and they were stretched too thin for him to keep chasing a Red Robin who didn't want to be chased. That's what Tim told himself.

But swinging out of Nightwing's Batman's path meant swinging into Hood's territory. Jason barked about it, but Tim didn't think he minded so much, as long as Tim didn't meddle. It was unclear what exactly constituted meddling, so Tim avoided all of it. Or tried to.

It had been two days since Red Hood had last been seen in Crime Alley. That wasn't totally unheard of, in the grand scheme of things. Hood liked to be unpredictable. But a dispute had broken out between dealers on the second day and Red Hood hadn't shown. People were starting to notice.

So now, on day three, Tim found himself peering into Hood's most frequently occupied safehouse on the off chance that… What? He could see something? He wasn't sure. But this was almost definitely meddling and it made the skin between his shoulder blades prickle.

The safehouse itself was dark and still, but a light shone in the back half, its source out of sight except for the residual glow. Tim waited, crouched and pensive on the fire escape. No Hood.

He could just go. It was probably fine.

Tim shifted on the ball of his foot and nearly turned away, prodded as

he was by the mental image of Hood, his territorial nature, and his many, many guns. But… Tim had come here when he had had nowhere else to go, and Hood had patched him up when there had been no reason for him to. When it would have been in his own interest not to.

Tim sighed and pushed open the window, bypassing the various traps and triggers meant to keep others out. (He assumed. They were easy to disable for anyone with Bat training. If Hood had really wanted him kept out, he should've tried harder.)

Inside, there was a faint sour smell but otherwise nothing out of the ordinary. Hood's safehouse always surprised Tim with how clean it was. Though there wasn't much inside, every item had its place and was carefully tucked into it. The floor was swept. The counters were empty and scrubbed shiny.

Tim scanned the living room, then the kitchen, then poked his head into the entry hall, only to freeze. There were boots by the door. Empty, carefully lined next to the mat with their toes touching the wall. Red Hood's boots. And the red helmet hung on the hook above them.

Tim retreated slowly, backing up into the heart of the apartment once more with his bo staff extended. There were no signs of a struggle, no blood spatters, no bullet holes. No cause for concern at all, really, except for the boots and the helmet without the body that wore them.

The bathroom door was open. The light was on, but there was no blood on the tile, no body slumped in the tub. That left only the bedroom, a corner of the apartment that Tim was forbidden from entering. Hood had never actually said so—that would mean Tim *was* explicitly allowed in other parts—but it has been strongly implied that the bedroom was off limits, on pain of beheading.

The door was closed. Tim stood outside, waiting, listening. The bedroom sounded as still and empty as the rest of the apartment. He turned the knob, staff at ready, then paused in the doorway as his eyes adjusted to the gloom.

The room was dark, the glow of the streetlight blocked by the vinyl curtain pulled across the window. The smell was stronger here, making Tim's nose wrinkle. There was a dark mass on the bed. Pillows?

No. Hood.

He lay curled on his side, a tight ball with his spine turned toward the door so all Tim could see was a broad back and a pale gray shirt soaked dark.

“Hood?” Tim whispered. No response.

He stepped forward, then froze when his foot sank into something cold and wet.

Annnnnd that’s puke.

“Gross,” Tim hissed, hopping backward out of the room. In the bathroom, he pulled off his shoe and left it in the sink, then considered and left his other shoe and both socks on the floor.

His second approach into the bedroom was even more cautious and aided by the light from his phone. Hood had yet to move, but now, at least, Tim could see the shallow rise and fall of his torso. Not dead was good. The possibility had always been in play, but Tim had held it an arm’s length, fanned in his hand with the other possible answers for Hood’s mysterious absence. Now that death was off the metaphorical table once more, Tim found himself eager to tuck it away and out of sight, unexamined and unexplored.

There was, however, still a mystery to be solved. With the light, Tim could see one or two additional puddles of vomit that dotted the floor, leading up to a wastebasket that sat next to the bed. He stepped around them carefully and avoided looking into the can.

“Hood?” There was a strong chance that Hood had one or multiple weapons stashed within reach, and he didn’t strike Tim as a peaceful riser. But even after another call and a prod between the shoulder blades with the end of the bo, nothing.

No, not nothing. Hood was shivering visibly.

Still tensed and at ready, Tim crept forward until his shins hit the bed frame, then levered himself up on one knee.

“Jason?”

Tim caught Hood by the shoulder and rolled him over with a grunt. Jason’s body was stiff, tight with shakes and—Tim drew a hand back from Jason’s forehead with a hiss. Fever. A bad one, to judge by the state of him.

“Okay,” Tim mumbled. “Okay, okay, okay, okay. Um.”

This was not—That is, he didn’t—What was he supposed to do? He and Jason, they weren’t… anything. By rights, Tim shouldn’t even be here. Hood had tried to kill, more than once, and had been very clear about how he hated anything and everyone connected with Bruce.

But Bruce was dead. And Tim was alone. And Jason was too.

“Hey. Hey,” Tim said, patting at Jason’s cheek. Yuck. His skin felt clammy, like a wax dummy left to sit out too long. “Wake up. Hood. Jason, wake up.”

One blue eye cracked open and roved unfocused.

“Jason?” Tim leaned forward and pushed the damp hair off Jason’s forehead. “Can you hear me? I think you’re sick. Can you tell me what happened?”

Jason’s head moved slightly, but he didn’t respond. The eye drifted shut again. Tim rocked back and tried to think.

This was bad. Wasn’t it? Fevers could be dangerous, right? How hot was bad hot?

Tim flipped on the table lamp and left the bed—one eye on the floor to avoid anything unpleasant—and hurried to the bathroom. Jason kept a kit beneath the sink. Tim rifled through it until he found the thermometer, then returned to the bed.

Jason had not moved. Tim could hear his breath puffing out in shallow wheezes. Bad.

“Please don’t shoot me, please don’t shoot me,” Tim chanted under his breath as he poked the thermometer into Jason’s mouth, wiggled it under his tongue, and held it in place.

No guns, no knives whipping out to stab, but when the thermometer beeped, the display read 104.1.

*Oh, so **that’s** bad hot.*

He couldn’t take Jason to the hospital. Jason Todd was dead, legally speaking. Leslie was out, too—no way to convince an ambulance to go to the clinic instead of a hospital, especially after hours.

“Time to go old-fashioned,” Tim mumbled to himself and pulled out

his phone.

Google said to call a doctor for anything over 104. Tim snorted and kept scrolling.

“Ooh. Pyrexia. Fancy.” Jason had no comment.

Tim stopped and expanded the bullet-point list offered by one article with tips for lowering a fever. “Jay, you don’t have an aspirin allergy, right? Or kidney disease?”

Tim hoped he didn’t. It would be really stupid to tank a major organ by accident.

“Hmmmkay.” Tim tucked away his phone and stared down at Jason’s still form. “The internet says a bath, hydration, meds, and rest. We can do that. We can do that.”

The bathroom was really far away. But Google said baths lowered body temperature efficiently, and Tim was pretty sure he’d read a headline or seen a TikTok or something about a bad fever making some guy’s brain juice dribble out his ear.

Bruce would be really upset if he came back and Jason’s brain had melted out of his earhole.

Tim grabbed Jason by the shoulders and tried to lever him up. “Jason, you need to wake up. Okay? I can’t carry you to the bathroom by myself.” Maybe if the apartment were on fire or something, he could try dragging Jason to the door, literally drag him by the ankles, but that didn’t seem like the proper care procedure for this situation.

“Jay, please,” Tim began, then cut himself off when he had to scramble to keep Jason from slumping off the bed and hitting the floor. Instead, he crashed against Tim, dead weight like a bull leaning on a flamingo. His head lolled against Tim’s shoulder, and it said something about Tim’s life recently that the touch made a lump rise to his throat. They weren’t having a *moment*. Red Hood was unconscious, covered in his own vomit, and totally unaware Tim even existed. But it had been a very, very long time since Tim had felt the comfortable warmth of another human against his side.

He wished Dick were here. Dick would know what to do.

Tim sucked in a fortifying breath and looked to the door. “Okay, Robin. You can do this. You can *do* this. C’mon, Robin, c’mon.”

Never mind that he wasn't Robin anymore. He needed that magic now, that little bit of possibility-defying strength.

"Rob'n."

Tim nearly jumped out of his skin as Jason stirred.

"Jason? Jason??"

But Jason didn't stir again.

It was too far to the door, too far beyond that to the bathroom and the lipped tub that he would need to lever Jason into.

Time for Plan B.

As carefully as he could, Tim lowered Jason back down onto the bed, then pulled off his crusty t-shirt and cargo pants.

"Air circulation," Tim explained, as if saying it aloud might keep Jason from murdering him slowly later. "Also, you got barf on your shirt and it reeks."

Said shirt was balled up and chucked into the laundry hamper sitting in the corner of the room. Tim would figure out what to do with the clothes later. Right now, he needed to cool Jason down, and fast.

After some searching, Tim found a small stack of washcloths, no more than three, and grabbed the fourth from the shower along with the hand towel hanging on the rack by the toilet. They felt cleanish, at least, and they would do for now. He carried the armful of linens to the kitchen where he added the dishtowel hanging from the oven door to the pile, then dumped them all in the sink.

Each piece of fabric was thoroughly soaked in cold water, then rung out, and the larger towels were wrapped around the medical ice packs Tim dug out of the kit.

Jason was still on the bed, crumpled where Tim had left him. In the weak yellow glow of the bedside lamp, Tim could at least see his chest rising and falling. Tim piled his armful of supplies on the end table, then hurried to place them where they would do the most good. The first washcloth was laid over Jason's forehead and eyes. He sighed, making Tim flinch back in case he was waking.

"Okay," Tim whispered when nothing else happened. "Okay, good."

Cooling the armpits and groin was effective for lowering overall body temp, the internet had said, and Tim hadn't had time to crosscheck his facts so he just rolled with it. He'd stuck to the first three non-sponsored search results, so that had to be fine. Just to be safe, one of the ice pack towels was tucked under Jason's neck, and the other he plunked in the middle of his chest.

"The internet says to watch for shivering," Tim explained, because talking it through aloud made standing over Red Hood's unconscious, half-clothed body in a dimly lit room feel less creepy. "Turns out ice baths are a total lie."

Another Hollywood myth biting the dust. Life really was just one long series of disappointments, wasn't it.

He would let the washcloths do their thing for the next… How long? Half hour? Was that too long or too short? Maybe he would just keep checking the cloths to swap them out once they were too tepid.

Tim kept one washcloth and did his best to sponge Jason down, though he had always pictured a sponge bath requiring one of those big, kidney-shaped yellow sponges instead of a gray square. It made Tim uncomfortable, if he were being honest, wiping down a virtual stranger. He tried to be quick and respectful about it, but also, Jason was… weird, and he couldn't help looking.

Tim had expected something different. Not the broad linebacker shoulders and the washboard abs. Those, sadly, were both right in line with Hood's general persona and also just freaking typical. Tim was sixteen, almost seventeen, and people still mistook him for fourteen sometimes. He had muscles too, okay? He worked out. But if he'd been a girl, people would've called him petite or "fun-sized" instead of just scrawny, and next to Hood he felt like the locker-stuffed nerd next to the star quarterback. Or the star quarterback's pickup truck, because Hood was *huge*.

No, the weird thing was the lack of scars. The vigilante life was hard. They had all been trained in various fighting styles and self-defense, they wore armor, they didn't take reckless chances (too often, anyways, ish), but they all bore scars. And Jason, Jason should have more than most. He had been *beaten to death*. But the few scars he had looked newer, and he had far less than Tim.

It was all weird. And there had to be a reason, something beyond Jason having magically rejuvenating skin, although he wore that full

helmet all the time and didn't have so much as a pimple, so maybe the universe just really loved him after all. Tim rubbed at the still-healing hole in his own shoulder and shook his head.

Hydration was next. Tim backtracked to the kitchen and filled a glass from the cupboard with tap water, then poured a little out again to make room for ice from the freezer. He had taken only a step or two before a fondly chastising voice in the back of his head chased him back to the fridge to look for something with electrolytes or sugars. He knew what electrolytes were, sort of. He definitely knew what sugars were, but Hood didn't have juice in his fridge, which for some reason felt like a personal betrayal. Tim scowled and abandoned the search for mythical electrolytes. That could be round two.

Getting Jason to drink was another challenge. On his back, he would choke and maybe drown, which would just be the stupidest possible way to die, and Jason seemed like just the sort of person to resurrect himself *again* to make Tim pay for it. But levering Jason up again, even a little, disturbed the washcloths, making Tim whine with exasperation as he tried to keep Jason's head supported *and* grab the washcloths *and* hold the cup. He let the washcloths fall, but he hadn't thought to even look for a straw, so when he brought the cup to Jason's lips, the water dribbled everywhere. Far more water ended up on Jason and the bed than in him, so he wasn't sure what good it did after all, but it was the best Tim could do.

Wasn't that just par for the fucking course.

"I'm sorry." He had meant for the mess, but then he said it aloud, and no, not just that. Tim lower Jason back down, set the cup aside, and rubbed the knuckle of his thumb against his eye, as if he could just wipe away what a mess he was. "You should've had someone else here. I don't know what I'm doing."

Jason wouldn't have been surprised by that. Tim was just the replacement Robin anyways, horning in on a dead boy's job. A placeholder, it turned out. Damian probably knew exactly what to do for a fever. Little brat was probably halfway to a medical degree already, some freaky magic assassin medical degree. Al Ghulniversity.

Tim choked back a wet snort of a laugh, then picked one of the fallen washcloths up and dabbed at the spilt drink before replacing the cloth where it belonged. He sobered again as he stared down at the figure on the bed.

Jason did deserve someone else here. Anyone else. But there was no one. Far from being the center of the Manor's universe, as Tim could only assume he had once been, Jason had cut himself off from literally everyone and reinforced the break with violent emphasis. He had stopped trying to kill the others, for now at least. The fragile state of the city had necessitated a temporary truce. But he refused to talk to anyone back home, for any reason. Now on the other side of his own break, Tim understood him a little better. Or maybe understood was the wrong word. Jason could go home in a *second* and be welcomed with open arms. But even if Tim thought his reasons for staying away were crap, at least he had them. At least he stuck by them, even when it was hard. Even when it left him with no one but Tim.

It just didn't seem fair. Jason Todd deserved more than that.

"You should be at the Manor," Tim murmured.

Jason had said the same to him once. Tim had agreed privately, but there was nothing he could do. Robin was gone, given to someone else, and Bruce was still lost somewhere. There was no good to be done there anymore, and a job only he could do outside the Manor's walls.

"I'm going to bring him back," Tim promised, saying aloud what he hasn't dared speak to Jason before. Bruce was a sensitive subject, one more likely to get Tim shot than listened to. Even with the others, he couldn't talk about Bruce, not anymore. He'd missed it.

"He's out there, somewhere. I have some leads. They're not much, but they're something. I'm going to find him." As he spoke, Tim rearranged washcloths and wiped cool water across feverish skin. Jason didn't interrupt. It felt nice to have someone listen for once, instead of telling him that he was wrong, he was illogical, he was just grieving, he needed to *stop*.

"I won't stop," Tim insisted. "Bruce is alive. I know he is. My job is to watch out for him. I have to do my job. The city—" Who cared about the city. "We need him. I need him. You do, too."

Jason hated Bruce. He said he did, anyways, and it wasn't hard to believe when he went out of his way to hurt Bruce at every turn. But Tim hadn't missed the way Hood's murderous reckoning had peaked just after Bruce's alleged death or the way rubber bullets and broken kneecaps had found their way into his repertoire once the fever pitch of ruin had eased.

Maybe Tim was being naive. The others thought he was, about a lot of things. But Tim didn't think so. He liked facts and logic and the way the two made the pieces of the world click snugly together to form an image he could decipher. Jason Todd was a murderer. Jason Todd was angry at Bruce. These were facts, just like the presumed body of Bruce Wayne exhumed from the rubble of a smoldering building. Tim didn't discount facts. He just didn't ignore other facts at his disposal because they didn't fit at first glance.

Tim hadn't cried once since Bruce died, not in the Cave, not at the funeral, not since. Not over Bruce, anyways. That was a fact he couldn't explain and couldn't discount. The relentless, burning push in his gut to *do* something, that was a fact, one he couldn't explain to anyone else in a way they could understand. How could they? They hadn't felt the burn after Jason's death, the *need* to save Batman before he destroyed himself and the city with him. He couldn't ignore it then and he couldn't ignore it now.

Just like he couldn't ignore Hood's actions, which could be interpreted as a further break into murder and chaos, or could be seen as a deep and horrible grief. No one had asked, as far as Tim knew. And even if they had, he wasn't sure if Jason himself knew. Facts weren't always apparent, even to those who bore them.

"I'm going to find him," Tim promised again, voice catching as Jason's head turned slightly and pressed into the cool relief of the washcloth. "I'm going to bring him back. And you're going to *talk* to him. And everything's going to be okay. And the next time you're stupid and get yourself sick like this, you'll stay at the Manor and it'll be Alfred here instead of me."

He would fix this. He would fix this for everyone.

It took nine hours to bring Jason's fever down. Tim rotated the cloths regularly and managed to get more water down Jason's throat with the help of a water bottle he found in one of the cupboards. Broth, too, eventually, after he found a container in the very back of the fridge, and he spiked it with ibuprofen. In between rounds, he cleaned, stripping down to his base layer so future Jason wouldn't have cause to gut him for flouting his mask status in the safe house, and to control the nauseated flop sweat that broke out down his arms and back as he scrubbed at the vomit puddles on the floor.

Jason woke up only once, as Tim was preparing to go. He couldn't afford to wait until the fever was broken and banished. Jason would

be conscious and cranky and that bode poorly for Tim's quest to keep all of his bones intact. Instead, he beat the fever back and back and back until it simmered, low and grumbling like a caged tiger, at 100.1. Not fun, but no longer a pressing danger. It would likely drop and break entirely soon.

Tim had redressed, shoving his uniform into a garbage bag and throwing one of Jason's sweat sets over the base to let him escape in daylight. A clean and empty wastebin sat next to the bed, just in case, and the end table was lined with a fresh bottle of water, the capsule of ibuprofen, a bag of saltines, and Jason's phone, dug from the pockets of his pants pre-wash. Tim had been tempted to program in his own number. He hadn't.

The last step was refreshing the washcloths, to make them keep as long as possible. Tim had sat on the edge of the bed, repositioning them just so and pushing dank, unwashed curls off Jason's forehead, when Jason had shifted with a groan. Tim froze, breath held, his fingertips still in Jason's hair.

"Dad?" It was just a whisper, scratchy with illness and disuse. Tim didn't answer, couldn't have around the sudden lump in his throat. Jason wasn't awake, not really, couldn't know what he was saying, but Tim held very still, as if moving would be an intrusion between the ghost of the Robin who had been and the hollow space of the father he had loved.

Jason shifted again, head turning against the pillow, eyes blocked by the damp cloth over his eyes. "I don't feel so good." He sighed, sounding weary and put out by the whole thing, and slipped back into sleep.

Tim understood. It was so easy to fall back asleep when you thought Bruce was there, making sure everything would turn out okay.

When it felt safe to breathe again, Tim adjusted the cloth over Jason's eyes one last time, then rose and backed away from the bed.

"I'm going to fix this. I'm going to bring him back," Tim promised again to the empty room, the body on the bed, and to himself. He thought he remembered hearing that a thrice-spoken vow was a powerful thing, an unbreakable and holy pact. Maybe it was, maybe it wasn't, or maybe it was only when you meant it to be. Tim meant it to be.

"I'm going to be away for a little while. I have a lead." Jason's clothes

were too big. Tim had to pause to retighten the string at the waistband and roll up the cuffs.

He was stalling, and he knew it, but it was time to go. “Try not to get yourself killed before I’m back,” Tim said, meaning it as a throwaway line over his shoulder, but then he paused and added, “Or if you do, bring yourself back again. Bruce will be happy to see you.”

Tim left the bedroom door ajar, then braced himself against the wall to wiggle on his boots and heft the bag with his uniform over his shoulder. Outside, the afternoon sun glittered dimly through the haze. Tim shoved his bag through the open window and crawled out after it. The apartment was dark and still. He shut the window behind him.

End Notes

Gifted to audrey because she read it when I was stuck halfway and assured me she wasn't bored.

Tim: we are definitely not brothers
The universe: they were, in fact, brothers, it's just that siblings can be weird

Timing-wise, this would be after the third chapter of If the Sky Comes Falling Down but before The Return. Also before the emancipation of Timothy Drake's spleen.

2025 ETA: This fic ended up kicking off the entire Mutual Aid series but *also* is part of the Returnverse series, which itself is a loose collection of interconnected fics. If you like this one, you'll like the others, but you don't need to read beginning to end for each series to understand everything.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!